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SUBJECT: KUWAITI FM RAISES CONCERNS OVER IRAQ WITH DEPUTY
SECRETARY

Classified By: Ambassador Deborah K. Jones for reasons 1.4 b and d

11. (C) Summary: In an October 7 meeting, Deputy Secretary Negroponte told Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Dr. Mohammad Al Sabah that a just-completed country-wide visit to Iraq had revealed significant signs of stabilization and progress there. The Deputy Secretary said that, despite problems, Prime Minister Maliki has shown he has staying power and is a national leader, not merely a sectarian one. The Kuwaiti FM took the opportunity to remind Negroponte of Kuwait's ongoing concerns over potential destabilization in Iraq and its concomittant desire for a continuing USG presence there. The FM also detailed chronic GOK frustration and concern over Iraq's refusal, thus far, to designate an Ambassador to Kuwait, its intransigence on border issues, and its finagling on debt. The FM also shared with the Deputy Secretary Kuwait's irritation over the USG designation of the Kuwaiti-based Revival of Islamic Heritage Society as a terrorist organization and the continuing detention of four Kuwaitis in Guantanamo. The FM promised that Kuwait will be a responsible team player in the effort to resolve the global financial crisis. End Summary.

D Sees Progress Towards Normalcy in Much of Iraq

12. (C) Meeting at the FM's home, Masilla Palace, Deputy Secretary Negroponte on October 7 briefed Deputy Premier and Minister of Foreign Affairs Shaykh Dr. Mohammed Sabah Al-Salem Al Sabah on his October 3 - 7 visit to Iraq, which included stops in Baghdad, Kirkuk, Sulemaniya, Mosul, Irbil, Ramadi, and Basra. Negroponte noted that Iraq had made significant progress towards stablization since his 2004 - 2005 posting as Ambassador there, commenting that in cities like Ramadi a degree of normalcy had returned; this was a far cry from the case four years earlier, when Al-Qaeda had dominated the city. It was now possible to walk about the city, Negroponte observed, this time protected by Iraqi police and security forces from the Awakening Movement rather than predominantly the U.S. military. The focus of concern, he suggested, had moved northwards to Mosul, where Al Qaeda "remnants" remained active.

GOK Nervous on Iraq: Hopes for Continuing U.S. Role

13. (C) Dr. Mohammad noted that the GOK was encouraged by Prime Minister Shaykh Nasser Al-Mohammed Al Sabah's September 18 - 19 visit to Washington, which included a "great meeting with the President". The FM said the President had allayed GOK concerns about a possible shift in U.S. focus following the November elections when he assured the PM that the USG would remain committed to security in the Gulf. Notwithstanding these assurances, the FM said the GOK remained nervous about stability and security in Iraq and was concerned that negotiations on a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) between the USG and Iraq had not been resolved. The FM

inquired into the status of the SOFA negotiations, expressing concern that a change of administration in the U.S. could lead to diminished focus on the region.

14. (C) Negroponte responded that the U.S. role in the Gulf is based on long-term strategic interests. The situation in Iraq has improved so the issue is not as polarizing domestically as it once was. Overall Gulf security is not a matter of partisan controversy and one could reasonably expect a consistent U.S. presence in the region. The present U.S. administration desires to leave Iraq in the best possible condition for its successors and, to that end, hopes to have a SOFA in place. A SOFA will be needed to provide a continuing legal basis for U.S. operations there, following the expiration of the UNSC mandate on December 31. Negroponte observed that virtually all the senior Iraqis he had met with favor a SOFA, recognize that gaps remain in their domestic security apparatus, and desire a continued U.S. presence. Given the common interest in a SOFA, Negroponte said he hoped the negotiations would be concluded successfully and soon.

Kuwait Frustrated With Iraqi Intransigence on Borders, Debt

15. (C) Continuing the theme of GOK stability concerns, FM Al Sabah reiterated that Kuwait views a U.S. presence in Iraq as essential to Kuwait's security for the foreseeable future. Stability will take time. The FM acknowledged that he was "not thrilled" with Iraqi PM Maliki's policies and was particularly concerned by a perceived Iranian campaign to

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"criminalize" any Iraqi who supports a U.S. role in Iraq. Dr. Mohammad described the GOK's continuing frustrations to improve relations with Iraq. Repeated Kuwaiti attempts to "mend fences" had met no positive response from the Iraqis, he said. These included the Iraqi failure to designate an Ambassador to Kuwait, Iraqi refusal to allow a UN team to complete the maintenance of several border markers, Iraqi denial of a GOK request to buy a plot of land for its future embassy inside the Green Zone, ongoing squabbles over compensation to Kuwait Airways, Iraqi intransigence on expediting the crossing of commercial vehicles through the Safwan border crossing, and others. In one of a series of ongoing provocations, the Iraqis had recently irritated the GOK by building a structure twelve feet inside the Kuwaiti border. The FM attributed some of these provocations to the Iraqi Dawa party (PM Maliki's party) which is "a thorn in our side." The non-responsiveness of the Maliki government on border issues, in particular, made it difficult for the GOK to be more forthcoming on debt and compensation issues, as desired by Iraq.

Negroponte Counsels Patience on Iraq

16. (C) Negroponte observed that the process of selecting ambassadors is a painful one in Iraq and sometimes takes years. He noted that part of the problem appeared to be competition between PM Maliki and FM Zebari. Negroponte said the U.S. would continue to encourage forward movement on designating an ambassador to Kuwait. He also offered to look into Kuwait's ongoing dispute with Iraq over compensation to Kuwait Airways for damages incurred during the 1990 Iraqi invasion. Resolving the numerous differences between Kuwait and Iraq will take time, Negroponte noted. Notwithstanding these issues and many others, Negroponte said he found significant progress inside Iraq since his arrival there in 2004. Despite concerns, PM Maliki has demonstrated that he has staying power and that he is a national leader, not just a sectarian one. The Provincial elections anticipated for early 2009, he suggested, could broaden and balance the national political make-up by bringing into government a number of Sunni officials. Sunnis had boycotted the last

elections but are interested in participating now. These signs indicate hope for the future.

Fewer Foreign Fighters Cross Syria/Iraq Border

¶7. (C) In response to a query from Dr. Mohammad about the situation on the Iraq-Syria border, Negroponte said conditions have improved significantly. Thanks, in part, to Syrian interdiction and, in part, to coalition successes against Al-Qaeda, the number of foreign fighters who presently cross the border into Iraq is believed to be significantly lower than in the past. In a sign of improved Iraq-Syria relations, Iraq is now considering re-building its pipeline to Syria and providing a limited quantity of oil.

Iran Developing Capability to Produce Nuclear Weapon

¶8. (C) Turning to tensions over Iran's nuclear enrichment program, Negroponte noted that adoption of UNSCR 1835 recently reconfirmed the international community's resolve on this issue and that Iran appears "disquieted" by this display of international unity. Nevertheless, despite international efforts, Iran continues to enrich uranium and may possess enough fissile material to build a nuclear bomb sometime in the next decade. Responding to a query from FM Al Sabah on the Russian reaction, Negroponte said the Russians have been supportive of international pressure on Iran but are not as hard line as the U.S., perhaps because of their desire for a commercial relationship with Iran.

Kuwait to Host Arab Economic Summit in January

¶9. (C) Dr. Mohammad briefed Negroponte on Kuwait's plans to host the first Arab Economic Summit in January 2009. The GOK hopes the one-day summit will encourage Arab states to liberalize their financial and economic systems and establish new institutions for joint ventures between Arab countries. Commenting on the present global economic crisis, the FM suggested that Kuwait's long-standing policy of broad economic investment had left it in sounder financial condition than many other states. He promised that Kuwait will be a responsible "team player" in working with the international community to resolve the crisis.

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GTMO and RIHS Designation Irritate Bilateral Relationship

¶10. (C) Returning to the subject of the Kuwaiti Prime Minister's September visit to Washington, Dr. Mohammad noted there are some priority issues to be followed up, specifically the status of Kuwaiti detainees in Guantanamo and the designation by the USG of the Kuwaiti-based Revival of Islamic Heritage Society (RIHS). The FM stressed that the GOK has found no evidence linking RIHS to terrorist activity and objects to the U.S. designation. He noted that the U.S.-based firm Price Waterhouse provides accountancy services to RIHS. Deputy Secretary Negroponte noted that two of Kuwait's detainees at Guantanamo would be brought to trial as the President had informed the PM during their September 19 meeting. Ambassador Jones remarked that Kenneth Wainstein, Assistant to the President for National Security, will visit Kuwait soon to engage on these issues.

¶11. (C) The Deputy Secretary's staff cleared this cable.

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